

REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration of this application, in view of the present amendments and in light of the following discussion, is respectfully requested.

In the outstanding Office Action, Claims 1-2, 4-7, 11, 14-15, 17-20, and 22 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takekuma (U.S. Patent No. 6,377,329) in view of Kimura (U.S. Patent No. 6,439,822, hereafter “Kimura”), Yoshioka (U.S. Patent No. 6,168,667), Lei (U.S. Patent No. 6,277,199, hereafter “Lei”), and Makino (U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0051091, hereafter “Makino”); Claims 9-10 and 21 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takekuma, Kimura, Yoshioka, Lei, Makino, in further view of Slocum (U.S. Patent No. 5,733,024, hereafter “Slocum”) and Cakmakci (U.S. Patent No. 4,836,968); Claim 3 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takekuma, Kimura, Yoshioka, Lei, Makino, and Masayki (JP 10-012528, hereafter “Masayki”); and Claims 12, 16 and 23 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takekuma, Kimura, Yoshioka, Lei, Makino, and Slocum.

Initially, Applicants gratefully acknowledge the courtesy of Examiner Ford in conducting a personal interview with Applicants’ representative on October 29, 2009. During the interview, the outstanding issues in this case were discussed, as summarized herein below and in the Interview Summary, which the Examiner has made of record. Examiner Ford thought it important that the claims be amended to provide further detail regarding the freely attachable/detachable feature of the process blocks. However, no agreement was reached pending further search and consideration.

In reply to the rejection of Claims 1-2, 4-7, 11, 14-15, 17-20, and 22 as being unpatentable over Takekuma, Kimura, Yoshioka, Lei, and Makino, Claim 1 is amended to recite, *inter alia*, a substrate processing apparatus that includes:

a plurality of process blocks arranged along said transfer path, each process block freely attaching to the transfer block *by pressing against the transfer block*, each process block freely detaching from the transfer block by pulling away from the transfer block each process block including at least one connection end to connect to a connection end of the at least one utility unit *by pressing against the connection end of the at least one utility unit* to receive utilities from the transfer block. (Emphasis added.)

Turning to the primary reference, Takekuma describes a substrate processing apparatus that alleviates the burden on a main conveying mechanism to increase throughput.¹ Takekuma also describes that the apparatus includes a first processing block (100) having four coating units (3), a second processing block (200) having a light exposure apparatus (52), and a third processing block (300) having four developing units (5).² Takekuma also describes that the first, second and third processing blocks (100, 200, 300) are detachably connected to the substrate processing apparatus via the interface section (51).³

However, Takekuma does not describe that the first, second and third processing blocks (100, 200, 300) attach to the interface section (51) by pressing against the interface section (51). Instead, Takekuma merely describes that the sections and blocks are “detachably connected” without providing any further detail as to how this connection is made.⁴ Conversely, amended Claim 1 recites that each process block freely attaches to the transfer block *by pressing against the transfer block* and also recites that each process block freely detaches from the transfer block by pulling away from the process block. Therefore, Takekuma fails to disclose the plurality of process blocks recited in amended Claim 1. Further, Takekuma also fails to disclose the claimed utility unit, as acknowledged by the outstanding Office Action at page 5.

¹ Takekuma at column 2, lines 10-15.

² Takekuma at column 6, lines 19-50; see also column 7, lines 24-30.

³ Takekuma at column 5, lines 65-67.

⁴ Takekuma at column 5, lines 65-67.

However, the outstanding Office Action identifies Lei as describing this feature. Lei describes a modular system for fabricating integrated circuits that includes a plurality of stations that connect to a vacuum processing chamber and a transfer chamber, and a gas supply manifold with a first end connected to a gas source and a plurality of second ends each connecting to a gas panel at a plurality of stations.⁵ More specifically, Lei describes that the gas panel (30) is used to isolate control valves, safety shutoff valves, actuators, mass flow controllers, and associated electronics for the purpose of controlling and optionally containing the gas supplies.⁶ Lei also describes that the gas panels (30) are coupled to a similar structure supporting the corresponding process chamber (14) so that the process unit that includes the process chamber and the gas box acts as a single module that can be easily interfaced with a cluster tool having a gas supply manifold.⁷

However, Lei does not describe how the process chamber (14) or gas panel (30) are interfaced to the cluster tool or the gas supply manifold. Instead, Lei merely describes that the cluster tool includes processing stations on which the processing chamber (14) is mounted and to which connection of an individual gas panel (30) may be made at the terminal end of one or more gas delivery manifolds (52) or individual gas delivery lines (54).⁸ Nowhere, however, does Lei describe that connection of the gas box to the gas manifold (52) or individual gas delivery lines (54) is made by pressing the gas panel (30) against the terminal ends of these structures. Conversely, amended Claim 1 recites that each process block includes at least one connection end to connect to a connection end of at least one utility unit by pressing against the connection end of the at least one utility unit to receive utilities from the transfer block. Therefore, Lei fails to disclose the claimed connection ends, and does not cure the above-noted deficiency in Takekuma. Moreover, none of Kimura, Yoshioka, or

⁵ Lei at column 2, lines 55-65.

⁶ Lei at column 1, lines 23-37.

⁷ Lei at column 5, lines 12-19.

⁸ Lei at column 7, lines 9-16.

Makino cure these deficiencies in Takekuma and Lei. As such, no combination of Takekuma, Kimura, Yoshioka, Lei and Makino describe every feature recited in amended Claim 1, and amended Claim 1 is believed to be in condition for allowance, together with its corresponding dependent claims.

Amended Claims 4 and 20 recite features substantially similar to those recited in amended Claim 1, and are thus believed to be in condition for allowance, together with any claims depending therefrom, for substantially similar reasons. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of Claims 1-2, 4-5, 15, 17-18, 20 and 22 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) be withdrawn.

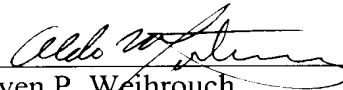
As all other rejections of record rely upon Takekuma and Lei for describing the above-distinguished features, and the above-distinguished features are not disclosed or suggested by Takekuma and/or Lei, alone, in combination or combination with any other art of record, it is respectfully submitted that a *prima facie* case of obviousness has not been presented. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of Claims 3, 9-10, 12, 16, 21, and 23 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), be withdrawn.

For the reasons discussed above, no further issues are believed to be outstanding in the present application, and the present application is believed to be in condition for formal allowance. Therefore, a Notice of Allowance for Claims 1-7, 9-12, and 14-23 is earnestly solicited.

Should, however, the Examiner deem that any further action is necessary to place this application in even better form for allowance, the Examiner is encouraged to contact Applicants undersigned representative at the below-listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,

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